

## Philip Harris (1926-2018)

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Philip Harris, who died on 21 July 2018 at the age of ninety-one, was born in Woodford, Essex, and educated at St Anthony's School in Woodford (1932-7), St Ignatius College in London (1937-44), Birkbeck College, London, and the Institute of Historical Research. In 1953 he was awarded an M.A. for a thesis on 'English Trade with the Eastern Mediterranean in the Late 16<sup>th</sup> Century'. From 1947 onwards he was on the staff of the British Museum (of which the Library was then part), becoming Assistant Secretary in 1959, Deputy Superintendent of the Reading Room in 1963 and Deputy Keeper in 1966. He was in charge in turn of the Acquisitions, the English and North European, and the West European Branches of the Department of Printed Books. In 1998 he published his *History of the British Museum Library*, the fruit of more than ten years' research after his 'retirement' in 1986.<sup>1</sup> His final project there, almost complete when he died, was on the Old Royal Library donated to the Museum by George II.<sup>2</sup> At his funeral the first reading was read by a former head of the Chinese Department there.

His first contribution to the Catholic Record Society was a massive article of nearly a hundred pages in *Recusant History* 8 (1965-66) on 'The Reports of William Udall, Informer, 1605-12'.<sup>3</sup> Since Udall was in the service of, among others, both the Earl of Salisbury and Sir Everard Digby, this was a significant addition to the published documents on the Gunpowder Plot, the discovery of which Udall later claimed to have offered to the King 'eleven months beforehand'. It was followed in 1969 by 'The English College, Douai, 1750-94', a preliminary study for his *Douai College Documents, 1639-1794*, which was published by the C.R.S. in 1971 as Records Series 63.<sup>4</sup> About the same time Philip became a member of the Society's editorial committee, remaining so for nearly fifty years, and was subsequently

<sup>1</sup> P. R. Harris, *A History of the British Museum Library, 1753-1973* (London: British Library, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Information in this paragraph taken from the Order of Service for the funeral mass, collated by Fr Stewart Foster.

<sup>3</sup> P. R. Harris, 'The Reports of William Udall, Informer, 1605-12. Part I', *Recusant History* 8 (1965), 192-249; P. R. Harris, 'The Reports of William Udall, Informer, 1605-1612. Part II', *Recusant History*, 8 (1966), 252-284.

<sup>4</sup> P. R. Harris, 'The English College, Douai, 1750-94', *Recusant History*, 10 (1969), 79-95; P.R. Harris, 'Douai College Documents, 1639-1794', *CRS Records Series*, 63 (1971).

volumes editor until 1992. It was not an easy time to hold the job: at one point in the 1970s inflation reached 27%. In 1980 the foreword to Occasional Publication 1 (*1767 Returns of Papists: Chester Diocese*) included the pessimistic note: 'if the Society's finances make it possible ever to publish the second volume'.<sup>5</sup> One response to this crisis was the appeal which eventually ensured that the Society had substantial invested assets to support its work. The other was the decision that an enlarged *Recusant History* should become its main publication and that the volumes, which until the 1950s had been its only publications, should in future appear only when there was enough spare money to fund them, which it was then thought might be once every two years. Moreover, there had been some opposition to the launching of the Monograph Series alongside the Records Series. The first Monograph, J. Anthony Williams on Wiltshire recusancy, had come out in 1968, and the second, Aveling on recusancy in the city of York, in 1970.<sup>6</sup> There was then a gap of twelve years, during which it began to seem that the Monographs might have been an unsuccessful experiment. However, with the publication of Blom's *The Post-Tridentine English Primer* (Monograph 3, 1982) and of Geoffrey Parmiter's *Edmund Plowden* (Monograph 4, 1987) it was clear that they were a permanent and important initiative.<sup>7</sup> For this Philip deserves much of the credit.

The work of a general editor is sometimes overlooked or undervalued; it was not until 1968 that the C.R.S. printed a list of its editorial committee in its volumes and not until 1999 that one of them was identified as volumes editor. But the high quality of the volumes produced during Philip's long tenure is evidence of the scholarly checking and copy-editing which are always needed, however meticulous the original author or transcriber has been, and were more necessary and took longer when books were set in hot metal from typescript—a process which some younger scholars now find hard to appreciate. Moreover, he was always ready to share his vast knowledge with other researchers and to go to trouble on their behalf to track down an elusive manuscript or item of information. Before me as I write is one such extract, with the characteristic comment: 'I do not guarantee that all the spellings are faithful to the original. It was a very hot day on Friday, and legal documents of this kind are not the best thing to keep one awake'. Towards the end of his life he became one of the Society's four trustees, where again his experience and solid

<sup>5</sup> *Returns of Papists 1767: Diocese of Chester* (London: Catholic Record Society, 1980), foreword.

<sup>6</sup> J. Anthony Williams, *Catholic Recusancy in Wiltshire, 1660-1791* (London: Catholic Record Society, 1968); J. C. H. Aveling, *Catholic Recusancy in the City of York, 1558-1791* (London: Catholic Record Society, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Blom, *The Post Tridentine English Primer* (London: Catholic Record Society, 1982); Geoffrey de C. Parmiter, *Edmund Plowden, an Elizabethan Lawyer* (London: Catholic Record Society, 1987).

judgement were much appreciated. His colleagues and the wider world of scholarship have many reasons to remember him with affection and gratitude. *Requiescat in pace.*